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ABSTRACT

Educational administration is an applied professional field that is more like medicine and law than it is like sociology or economics. However, education has struggled for years to take a broad and somewhat ill-defined field of endeavor and create a hard discipline. This attempt has helped separate the practitioner and the professor. Collaborative arrangements between university personnel and elementary and secondary school personnel would result in a data base that could improve the quality of educational research and lead to increased knowledge in the field. (Author/MLF).

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# Educational Administration
# The Development and Utilization of a Unified Knowledge Base

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*This paper is revision of a speech presented in February, 1979 at the University Council for Educational Administration annual meeting by Dr. Larry W. Hillman. Hillman is Professor in the Division of Administrative and Organizational Studies in the College of Education at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan.*

The education business in the United States is truly a big business. This nation spent roughly 7.5 percent of its gross national product or approximately 155 billion dollars on education in 1978.[1] Professors are about the business of preparing administrators who guide and direct this large activity. The professors who are in the preparation business at the universities and the administrators who manage the schools are all a part of a field of study referred to as educational administration.

I submit to you that educational administration is an applied professional field, which is more like medicine and law than it is like sociology or economics. As a part of the larger field of education, educational administration has not yet achieved discipline status even though it exists in a university community where status and rewards are largely dependent upon its capability to emulate the arts and science disciplines.[2] Thus, education has struggled for years to take a broad and somewhat ill defined field of endeavor and create what other people from across the university campus would call a hard discipline.[3] This attempt to distinguish education and its subcomponents as a hard discipline rather than establish it as an applied professional field has wasted a great amount of time, has frustrated some of the most creative minds who have chosen to enter the field and, more importantly, has helped separate the practitioner and the professor.

The professor has been scurrying about seeking the disciplinary purity which would give the field of endeavor a posture of status related to the university culture.

The professor has been using jargon related to the arts and science disciplines and not feeling comfortable with the administrator who appears to be living day to day.

The practicing administrator has been solving problems on a day-to-day basis not understanding the professors reluctance to understand this role and the administrators need to behave in this manner. The practicing administrator has been accepting the professors' quest for the hard discipline posture and related jargon because it did not appear to be either particularly offensive or helpful.

Hills,[4] 1977, stated that a field of professional practice has at least three defining characteristics:

1. It focuses on the solution of problems encountered in practice, i.e., it has a clinical orientation;
2. It possesses a specialized body of knowledge that undergirds practice; and
3. It brings together under a single umbrella professors (those who build the knowledge base and train practitioners) and practitioners (those who practice the profession and provide the focus for development of the field).

Hills also highlighted certain challenges in the field; the lack of concensus about what the problems of practice are; the limited progress made in identifying areas of the social sciences relevant to practice and developing the wherewithal for translating that knowledge into operational activities; and the separation which exists between professors and practitioners and the fact that they do not see themselves as part of a single profession.

The problem in educational administration is not unlike the problem in public administration, another developing field. A statement in the *Public Administration Review* supports the point:

> The challenge and dilemma. . . is how to improve the academic/practitioner interface, reduce the gap, cope with our inter-dependence, and achieve a proper balance between our two worlds in a way that even when there are explosions (they do) not remove the needed access. . . between us.[5]

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Many in the field of public administration feel that their crisis of identity is related to the lack of an accepted or agreed upon definition of just what public administration is or should be as a field of study and practice.[6] Other quotes from the field of publication administration would further delineate its similarities to educational administration. The desire in public administration for a single profession is quite evident.

Educational administration should be a single profession and there is certainly no logical reason for the members of that profession to behave as separatists.

If educational administration as a applied professional field is to focus on the solution of problems encountered in practice and at the same time develop a specialized body of knowledge to undergrid that practice, then how might this best be done. Is the practice activity clearly the orientation and the province of the school administrator? Is the development of the body of knowledge to support practice the province of the university professor? What is that special perspective each group can bring to the profession? The Committee on Fundamental Research relevent to education from the National Academy of Sciences spoke to this issue.[7] This 1977 report clearly separated the two sides of the house. The research side was made up of education professors and representatives of the social and behavioral sciences and the humanities. Practitioners were administrators as were board members and others. The report stated that there was not an army of practitioners waiting expectantly to hear what the researchers were saying any more than there was a group of researchers waiting to offer that information, "The two groups talk more among themselves than they do each other—and so they should if they are to do justice to their respective tasks."[8] This report asserted that this metaphoric dialogue does not do justice to the need for a strong relationship between the researchers and the practitioner.

The report established the special perspective of the administrator in terms of four groupings, . . .1) A view of reality, 2) a vision of the achievable, 3) know-how and 4) a commitment to act."[9] The perspective of the researcher might be established as one who is capable of careful, systematic and patient study and investigation. This person has to be fully acquainted with the body of knowledge in the field. The NAS Report, without stating it, clearly appeared to place these perspectives in either the practitioner or professor camp. It did this so it might assume the posture of establishing a clear role for a federally funded national dissemination group. It also clearly ignored the possibility that at any one time the perspectives could and do exist in both groups. It overlooked the possibility that a strong vehicle for dissemination would be a linkage between the two groups as they practice and do research. The report focused only on fundamental research and did not mention applied or policy research.[10] A quick glance shows that the practitioner has been deeply involved in applied research.

The separation between professors and practitioners which was implied in the NAS report tends to reflect the elitist stance which has been taken through the years by many professors. This stance is closely related to an ideology which relies more directly on formalized methods for the production of new knowledge. These methods assume that the data for this production can be retrieved through neutral and objective means. Neutrality and objectivity also assume that data collection can ignore or not be affected by social, cultural and political forces present in today's educational institutions.

These forces are at play in the everyday working life of the practitioner. It would seem that the best way to deal with these variables as they impact upon research would not be at the university but, in some long term, through collaborative arrangement with school administrators.

This raises the issue of the validity of data bases. One important location for potential bases, for example, is the federal government which will spend over 22.7 billion on education related activities in fiscal year 1979.[10] A large amount of this money, 9.7 billion, will be spent on programs carried on in the elementary and secondary schools.[11] The federal agencies administering these programs are responsible for determining if the money is being spent wisely. Therefore, program evaluations are called for and they take place on at least three levels.

In projects or grants awarded to an educational institution for a local activity there will a line item in the budget for evaluation. These dollars are to be spent to monitor the project and to collect data about that project's effectiveness as it relates to the project and program objectives. This money can be spent internally or externally but neutrality and objectivity are requested. Many of these evaluations are done by university personnel either through contracts between the local education unit and the university or between that unit and individual or groups of professors. Under these arrangements, the methodology for evaluation is developed by professors in collaboration with local school personnel. Any data collected in this kind of arrangement needs to be valid.

The next level of education comes when the federal agency responsible for administering a given program area collects the data and begins to compare the relative value of two or more projects which were supported. This level of evaluation does not seek the basic causes related to managing, teaching, learning, motivating, and so forth. But it does use the data to report findings designed to guide Congress in further program funding. The fact that it does not search for the causes and the interre-

lation between these causes does not preclude the use of these potentially rich data sources for research.

Weaknesses in the research are found in first level evaluations. These weaknesses relate to the organizational location of the evaluator and the methodological practices which are employed.[12] In a case study Ross Conner of the University of California, Irvine, explored the evaluator-manager relationship and discussed the differences. The evaluator was described as a individual concerned with detail. . . cool and uncommitted, a doubter. The manager was described as warm, outgoing, concerned about people, specifics, the here and now, a believer.[13] Conner went ahead to recommend that the most effective relationship would be one where the two had early interaction, worked cooperatively, shared commitment to the project and shared mutual trust and respect.[14]

Edward Weeks of University of Oregon stated that quality of evaluations is related to methodological practices, e.g., the number of measures used, the number of sources from which information is gained and the process for controlling bias.[15] Some of the more direct criticisms were 1) the confusion between the concepts of program inventory and program evaluation and 2) the contamination of program results by formative evaluation procedures.[16]

The third level evaluation activity is complete when a federal agency such as the General Accounting Office (GAO) or the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) compares the first and second level evaluations against the congressional intent in the legislation. This evaluation gives Congress the final information which will allow it to make policy decisions on how to spend its money.

The GAO is open in its criticism of the two prior levels of evaluation. Its criticism runs parallel to the literature stated earlier on the subject. The GAO is aware in its criticism that 155 billion dollars are spent nationally for education and that the federal tag is over 22.7 billion. Therefore, its criticism of methods for evaluations and the reliability of the data bases are understandable. Strong data bases are critical to the formulation of governmental policy for education.

In FY 1979 appropriation hearings, the Office of Education estimated that 668 million of the total appropriation request would be spent on research. Research in elementary and secondary education alone was estimated at 184 million.[17] The National Science Foundation disagreed with this figure since it includes evaluation in its definition of research.[18] Paul Weiss, for example, has observed that:

> "Evaluation is a theoretically grounded enterprise. It employs many agencies, most of which have been developed and have been found to be effective in other fields. It uses theories, formulae, experiment, mathematics and assesses results in accord with the best manuals in scientific method."[19]

This odyssey through the federal program evaluation process underscores the need for collaborative arrangements between university personnel and elementary and secondary personnel. Research is expensive and it is difficult to find money to conduct it. The money that is available at the federal level alone could be channeled into meaningful research both at the local, regional and national level. Collaborative arrangements could reduce the criticism leveled at evaluations if project objectives, and methodologies for evaluation were developed collectively. This would result in a data base which could improve the quality of the research and lead to increased knowledge in the field.

As a final point, it is important to look at the concept of training or preparing educational administrators. It appears that this portion of the professional activity is also not the sole province of the university professor. It is a collection of practical experiences meshed with university experiences.

The typical school administrator and professor of today completed a baccalaureate degree in a college of education or a college of liberal arts. After some years of teaching, a masters degree was acquired. This degree may or may not have been in educational administration. Many institutions which offer the doctoral degree in administration do not offer a masters in the same field. The prospective administrator then continues to teach until he or she can assume the position of a guidance counselor, department chairman, executive teacher or assistant principal. Throughout this time the prospect may be taking courses toward a specialist certificate. This may be the first serious concentration in that field of knowledge known as educational administration. The prospect will then become a building level administrator or take some central office position while she or he completes the specialist program. For many the specialist certificate is a terminal program. Others after more experience, will attend the university once again to achieve the doctorate.

This highest level of study attempts to bring into focus the full body of knowledge of educational administration. It does not train or prepare people to handle the everyday problems of education as they have had these experiences. Nor does the program assume that years of experience can give one an understanding of the body of knowledge in the field. Both experience and new knowledge are needed if administrators are to be prepared to handle the conceptualization of planning, organizing, staffing, directing, controlling, evaluating and providing the human relations glue needed to make administrators effective.

Data gathered relative to the preparation process in public administration was reported by Bowman in relation to the following question [20]

> What was the most important source of management information for the field?
>
> 28.5% of the professors thought they were and 23.6% thought that professional and academic societies were next. 20% selected practicing administrators as the most important source. 38.7% of the practitioners felt other practicing managers were while 15.2% selected government and private research as the most important source.

The data from Bowman again highlighted the points that the preparation of administrators takes place in an applied professional field. It is the careful give and take, the weaving of the thread that will bind theory and practice together that will cause a better utilization of the expertise and bring about a mutual respect for both practitioners and professors in the development of a body of applied scientific knowledge.

I have not tried to indicate that there is not a place for administrators in research but I do insist that it is not the province of only the university professor. I have not attempted to deny the importance of the university professor in training and preparation. Each must bring to this carefully planned activity what they have to bring. Each must respect what the other brings.

Here, in 1978, in the twentieth year of the existence of UCEA, I commend the member universities for taking the step of developing a Partnership which would ensure the resolution of the points spoken to in this paper. □

**NOTES**

1. See "Educational Research Limits and Opportunities," Third Annual Report of the National Council on Educational Research, National Institute for Education, Washington, D.C., March, 1977.
2. See "Reflections and Recommendations," Fourth Annual Report of the National Council on Educational Research, National Institute for Education, Washington, D.C., October, 1978, p. 18.
3. *Ibid.*, Fourth Annual Report, p. 18.
4. From a paper presented by R. Jean Hills to the UCEA Research Commission at the University of Rochester in the Spring of 1977.
5. James S. Bowman, "Managerial Theory and Practice: The Transfer of Knowledge in Public Administration," *Public Administration Review*, November/December, 1978, p. 563.
6. *Ibid.*, Bowman, pp. 563-64.
7. See "Fundamental Research and the Process of Education," A Report by the National Academy of the Sciences, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., August, 1977.
8. *Ibid.*, NASC Report.
9. *Ibid.*, NASC Report.
10. See Office of Management and Budget's Fiscal Year 1979 Budget Estimates. These estimates are for the governmental education related activities. They cover twenty-five departments and independent agencies, OMB, Washington, D.C.
11. *Ibid.*, OMB 1979 Budget Estimates.
12. Ross F. Conner, "The Evaluator-Manager Relationships" A Case Study and Model of A Successful Union," (An unpublished paper available from Dr. Conner through University of California, Irvine).
13. *Ibid.*, Conner.
14. *Ibid.*, Conner.
15. Edward C. Weeks, "Factors Affecting the Utilization of Evaluation Findings at the Local Level: An Empirical Test," A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evaluation Research Society; Washington, D.C., November, 1978.
16. *Ibid.*, Weeks.
17. See U.S. House and Senate Appropriations Committee Hearing for Fiscal Year 1979 documents.
18. *Ibid.*, Appropriations Committee Documents.
19. See paper given by Paul Weiss, Professor at Catholic University in Washington, D.C., at the November, 1978 Meeting of the Evaluation Research Society.
20. *Ibid.*, Bowman, pp. 563-570.